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GENERAL AND COMPLETE DISARMAMENT: TRANSPARENCY IN ARMAMENTS

Objective information on military matters, including transparency of military expenditures

Report of the Secretary-General

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. On 15 December 1994, the General Assembly adopted resolution 49/66, entitled "Objective information on military matters, including transparency of military expenditures". In paragraph 4 of the resolution, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to seek the views of Member States on ways and means to implement the guidelines and recommendations for objective information on military matters, including, in particular, how to strengthen and broaden participation in the United Nations system for the standardized reporting of military expenditures, and to submit a report on the subject to the General Assembly at its fifty-first session.

2. In response to his note verbale of 25 January 1996, the Secretary-General has to date received the reply which is reproduced in section II below. Should the Secretary-General receive further replies from Member States, they will appear in addenda to the present report.

II. INFORMATION RECEIVED FROM GOVERNMENTS

ITALY*

[Original: English]

[28 May 1996]

1. The members of the European Union have supported the consensus on General Assembly resolution 49/66. We wish to provide the following common reply to paragraph 4 requesting the Secretary-General to prepare a report on the subject taking into account the views of Member States.

2. The European Union continues to attach high importance to the United Nations system for the standardized reporting of military expenditures as instituted through the adoption of General Assembly resolution 35/142 B of 12 December 1980. Regrettably, although this measure of transparency and confidence-building has been in effect for about 15 years, the participation of States Members of the United Nations in 1995 barely exceeded 20 and is thus very low.

3. In our view, such a low participation is a cause for concern and indicates that the request to report military expenditures does not have sufficient acceptance by the community of Member States. As a first step, Member States should be called upon again to fully participate in this reporting. The European Union stands ready to encourage countries which have not yet done so, to do so.

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* On behalf of the European Union and of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe associated with it (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia) as well as of the associated countries Cyprus and Malta.

4. Furthermore, in order to strengthen the reporting on military expenditures, information should be sought on Member States' possible problems with the reporting and their reasons for not submitting the required data, so that appropriate changes could be considered to render this instrument more effective.

5. In particular, the structure of the standardized reporting system, which dates back to 1980, may have to be modified and adapted to today's requirements, taking into account, inter alia, structures of reporting systems on military expenditures that have been developed in other contexts.

6. To this end and in the interests of efficiency, the group of governmental experts meeting to discuss the development and expansion of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms which is expected to be convened by the Secretary-General in 1997 should also be mandated to prepare, in time for deliberation by the General Assembly at its fifty-second session, a report on necessary changes to the content and the structure of the reporting system to cope with the new challenges to international security since the implementation of resolution 35/142. In its deliberations on the enhancement of the reporting system, the group of experts should, inter alia, draw upon preparatory work on this issue undertaken by the United Nations Centre for Disarmament Affairs during the past several years.